

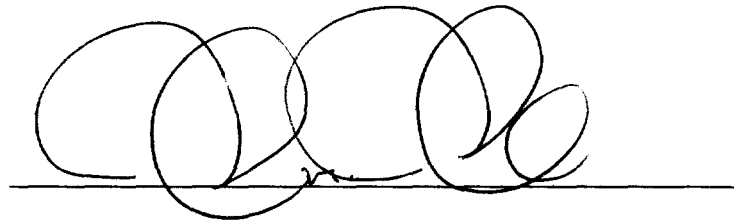
**The Ball State Sessions**

**An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)**

**By**

**Kevin J. Ross**

**Thesis Advisor:  
Stan Sollars**

A handwritten signature, likely of Stan Sollars, is written in black ink. The signature is composed of several large, overlapping loops and is positioned above a horizontal line.

**Ball State University**

**Muncie, Indiana**

**April 30, 2001**

**Graduation date: May 5, 2001**

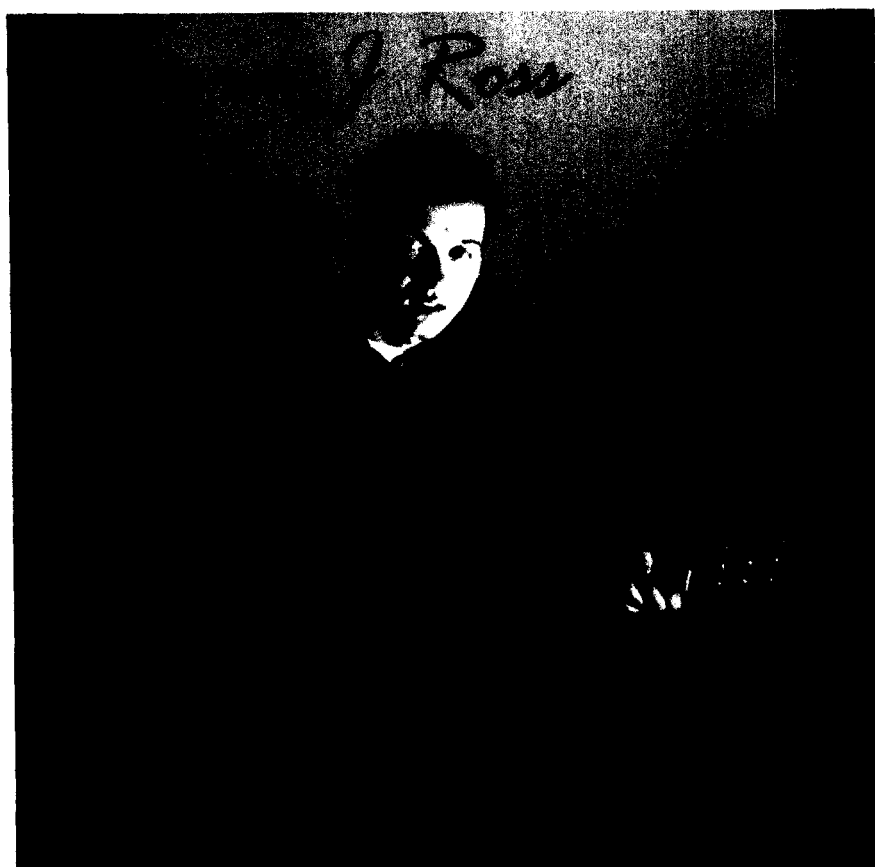
### **Abstract**

This thesis is the product of four months' work recording and producing five songs. Each song is self-written, and was chosen out of many others to be given a more professional sound. Each song was recorded onto multi-track audio tape, with drums, guitars, and keyboards layered over the basic vocal track. After the songs were recorded, the tracks were then mixed together until each track of the song was at its optimum strength throughout the song.

The design of the album art was done to also present a more professional look. Photographs were taken in a studio and edited for their necessary purpose. Pictures were chosen for the cover and the inside of the liner notes. These were designed to give the album listener basic information about the recording, such as lyrics and instrumentation. A tray card was also designed for the compact disc case. This was designed with other professional discs in mind, giving song information and presenting a picture of the artist.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to personally thank Stan Sollars, my thesis advisor, for all his help with bringing this project to its completion. He spared any time he could to get me into the recording studio, and showed unwavering confidence in me throughout the process, even when I doubted myself. His expertise in the studio was also greatly appreciated. Thanks also should go to Brian Pearce, who, as a student assistant in the audio studios of the Ball Communications Building, was invaluable in getting all the proper wires connected, and in helping me to stay calm when stress came on.



Music is a voice of reason. It is a voice of calming advice to those in the midst of turmoil, and a voice of love to someone far from home. It can bring great people together, and bridge gaps that we never thought to be surmountable. It is a voice of excitement and a voice of joy. But first and foremost, it is a voice. It is a way for those who wouldn't otherwise have a chance to speak to get their words out. It is their story, it is their anguish, and it is everything inside of them. Right here, right now, you are hearing a story. This story is mine.

Thirteen years ago, I got a Dixon acoustic guitar from my grandpa. He took my cousin Brian and I down to the garage in the back yard of his house, where he gave us each one of them. Ten years later, while in my freshman year of school at Ball State, I decided that I would finally learn how to play it. It was very ugly at first, but within a year I was playing relatively well. By the middle of my sophomore year, I had started writing songs. My first really good song was one called "Help Me Up." I wrote it in a couple hours and, once finished, played it for a friend, who instantly loved it. Two months later, I wrote a song called "One More Time," in tribute to my favorite teacher at that time, Maude Jennings. It went over very well. In fact, a friend asked me for the chords to the song so she could sing it at camp that summer. All these events excited me, to the point where I wanted to keep writing. I wrote whenever I could, wherever I could. Often, these songs were kept to myself, because there was not much of an audience to hear me. Gradually, though, the songs got better, and I started getting people to listen to me. And they liked it. The reactions I would get inspired me to continue on with writing. Eventually, I even became strong enough to perform entire sets with only my original music to stand by. In doing this, I was learning how to put a song together and

make it shine on stage. I had always been a solo performer, bringing just my guitar and my harmonica. I began imagining what my songs would sound like if they had other people playing behind me. I knew this would be a distant reality if I waited for the band to come to me. So instead, I began experimenting with multi-track recording on my computer, laying extra instrumental parts over those of me and my guitar. As this was happening, I was getting further and further into the Production option of the Telecommunications major. My class at the time was Advanced Audio with Stan Sollars. One of the projects in that class was to record a band and mix the recording into a proper-sounding album. This made me think about doing something similar. I began looking at what songs I would use, and learning what all the equipment in the studio did. I saw a great opportunity arise in front of my eyes. I would take myself into the studio, record all the tracks by myself, and mix them together to create my own demonstration recordings of the songs I had written. I knew how to make a band sound good. Now, it was time to figure out how to make myself sound good.

That is where this project comes from. Throughout the course of a four-month period in the winter and spring of 2001, I recorded, re-recorded, mixed and remixed five songs until I got them to a level where I was happy with them. Completing this project was more difficult than I'd ever imagined. I had no one in the studio to push the buttons in the control room, I had no one to tell me whether or not a take sounded good, and I had no one to help me calm down when I became frustrated with myself. However, I was determined to succeed. I took all the knowledge I had gained from my audio classes, and mixed it in with a little common sense and a little bit of self-motivation until I started making progress. Every step I took made me more confident in myself. I had to learn

quickly how to connect all the wires in the back of the mixing boards, how to deal with uncooperative electronics, and how to make dead air live. Instruments that wouldn't always work, and a voice that wouldn't always go where it was supposed to go. Through all this, I learned a lot about being a musician, and about being a record producer. I don't know if I'd ever realized until this that there is so much that has to go into a song between writing and releasing it. But now, I have a much better idea.

Within the five songs highlighted here, I hope you will find me. These songs, while not always directly from my life, have been inspired by little things that have happened around me. It is often hard to speak my mind when something comes up, but in song, I can talk to the world about those issues that I am trying to deal with. I no longer have to bottle up those emotions that weighed me down before. The artist is protected by the song. But then, they are also left wide open by it. Everyone can analyze it, looking for the hidden meanings and messages. With this recording, I am opening myself up to you. As I said before, I hope you will find me in here. And if we're lucky, maybe you will find a bit of yourself in here.

*Kevin Ross*

April 26, 2001

## ***Waiting To Fall***

*(Kevin Ross)*

I've gotten used to being the wrong one  
The wrong time and situation  
Every dream just comes undone  
Some nights I can hardly sleep at all  
'Cause it feels like  
I've been spending all my life waiting to fall

### **CHORUS:**

Head over heels in love  
What dreams are made of  
You know the kind we're always told we're gonna find  
I know it's out there  
I'll find it somewhere  
And if it takes forever I'll keep waiting  
Waiting, yeah yeah

Everyone says you're a good one  
That it shouldn't take much longer  
Until you find the right one  
But that's the last thing I want to hear  
Because it seems like  
I'm the only one waiting to fall

### **CHORUS**

But I know I'm not alone  
'Cause I look around, we're all just waiting to fall

### **CHORUS**

***Instrumentation:*** Vocal, Lead & Rhythm Electric Guitars,  
Bass, Programmed Drums, Harmonica

## ***Alright***

*(Kevin Ross)*

When you feel like your heart's been taken for a ride

It's alright

When you feel like that wall is too hard to climb

It's alright

And when you feel like your life is just going too rough

It's alright

And when you feel like you've had enough

It's alright

It's alright, it's alright

It's alright, it's alright

And when you feel like you never get the breaks

It's alright

And when you feel like you've had about as much as you can take

It's alright

And when you feel like you're reaching the end

It's alright

It won't be long before your heart's on the mend

Yeah, it's alright

It's alright, it's alright

It's alright

Any time you find yourself thinking you can't

There's someone there behind you to lend you a hand

And it's alright

And when you feel like love's gone and passed you by

It's alright

Some of these things, they just take a little time

And it's alright

It's alright, it's alright

It's alright

When you feel like you've been down this road before

And you feel so tired of walking that same old floor

And you wonder what it is you're waiting for

Keep on fighting, because I know, I know

You're gonna be alright

You're gonna be alright

You're gonna be alright

***Instrumentation:*** Vocal, Acoustic Guitar, Bass, Synth Violin



## ***Need You Now***

*(Kevin Ross)*

I don't need you now  
That's what I keep telling myself  
Trying to fool myself

And I'll be fine alone  
I can make it on my own  
How I just don't know

I've been looking for an answer  
Ever since the night you left

I can make it through the day  
I can live without your love  
No, I can't live without your love

Won't you come back down  
Because I need you  
Won't you come back down  
Because I need you  
I need you now

I'll have another chance  
Someone new will come along  
Please don't let me be wrong

I've still got my friends  
They picked me up when I hit the ground  
But you're still not around

I'll keep looking for you, I will carry on  
But I want you along, so...

CHORUS

***Instrumentation:*** Vocal, Acoustic Guitar, Electric Lead Guitar, Bass, Keyboard Drums

## ***Wanna Get You Back***

*(Kevin Ross)*

Honey don't tell me that it's over  
We've got so much more to give  
You know it's gonna kill me  
If we can't get this back again

Honey don't turn your back on me  
'Cause I've still got something to say  
If you won't let me tell it to you  
Well I'll say it anyway  
'Cause I wanna get you back  
Yeah I wanna get you back

Honey don't you close that door on me  
Don't leave me here in the cold  
I can see this getting to you  
And there's no one else I'd rather hold

Honey don't you want to hear me tell you  
There ain't never been nothing like this  
It hurts so much to be alone here  
And I can't stand to lose your kiss  
I wanna get you back  
I wanna get you back

Sentimental songs are song  
To the tune of this old guitar  
I'll do whatever I have to do  
To get this through to your heart  
'Cause I wanna get you back  
Yeah I wanna get you back

***Instrumentation:*** Vocal, Electric Lead and Rhythm Guitars, Bass, Keyboard Drums

## ***One More Time***

*(Kevin Ross)*

It's been so long  
Since I remember a time without you  
And even if we stop today  
You never will be gone

The time has been so fast  
For you I'm sure, I feel the same  
But what you've done will always stay  
With all who've seen your face

And I don't want to leave  
I'm sure I'm not alone  
But maybe here tonight  
You'll help us sing one more

One more time for the road that I'm getting on  
For the path that I take out of here  
That new place I'll call my home  
One more time for the ways you've shown my heart  
For the things I'd have never known alone

I still see where we were  
At the start of this parade  
And I remember just how lost I was  
How you helped me change

To know how far we've come along  
The distances we've shared  
To feel the love of those around  
A dream I'd never dared

And after all these days  
It's coming down to this  
In all that's said and done  
It's you I know we'll miss

REPEAT CHORUS 2X

***Instrumentation:*** Vocal, Acoustic Guitar, Lead Electric Guitar, Bass, Keyboard Drums

### ***Waiting To Fall***

This is one of my personal favorites. I began writing this over my family's Christmas 1999 trip to visit Grandma Ross in West Virginia. She still has one of Grandpa's old guitars, and I frequently get it out when I'm bored there. I started writing this after everyone else went to bed. I went downstairs and just started writing. I had a rough version of it done by the end of the night. When I say rough here, I mean it. The verse that is now first was originally the second verse, with a completely different first verse that set a different mood for the song. Eventually, it was cut. Also, I had the melody for the chorus in my head, but I had no idea how to convey it acoustically. I knew it would sound good on electric guitar, but that wasn't an option. I later realized that I could get a decent effect with a harmonica. Once I got to the studio for this project, though, I realized that the song had a very pop-oriented sound. However, I was not able to get rid of the harmonica. Even though I knew the electric guitar would sound fine, I had gotten so attached to the feel of the harmonica in the song that I couldn't pull it out.

It took me three months of sporadic work from start to finish to get this song where I wanted it. Once I got it there, though, the response was overwhelming. I played it at all my performances, and I got a number of compliments from listeners. It seemed that everyone could relate to it. And I could understand completely. It's a song I've been living for my entire life, and I somehow was able to tap into that feeling and turn it into this. Making a connection with listeners is really what music should be about. It helps them see that they're not alone on their journeys through life. I'm very proud that, at least once, I have been able to do this.

### ***Alright***

Musically, this is a bit of a tribute to Tom Petty. I've been a fan for a very long time. To me, it's amazing how he can make simple chord progressions sound so powerful. I came up with the basic chord progression while I was fooling around on my guitar one day. I kept playing it and playing it, and I knew I wanted to make it the basis for a song, but I didn't know what to sing over it. My roommate and I were just sitting around talking, and I came up with a verse or two. He then suggested kicking the chorus up a little bit. I tried it, and it seemed to work. I worked at it until I got enough good verses to make up a song. I had to throw some changes into the bridge, and once I got those all settled, the song pulled together very well.

The simplicity of this song is probably why I like it so much. Sometimes, I get too caught up in putting a lot of chords into the song, or making it really complex. But here, for once, I was able to just play it simply and it came out as well as, or better than, some of my more complex songs. As for Tom Petty? I'm still working my way up to his level.

### ***Need You Now***

This was inspired by a band recording project for my audio class. I had brought my acoustic guitar into the studio for the band to use, because they had an acoustic song and were considering using multiple guitars on the track. We had a lot of dead time in the course of the day, and I had been fooling around on my guitar sporadically. I had a chord progression in my head, but I couldn't get in the right frame of mind. I went into the control room to listen to the band in the studio. As I was listening to them, I got the

idea for the first verse. I went back out into the hallway to write it down. As I sang that verse, the words just flowed out for a while. The song was basically done within an hour. Later on, I pulled out one of the verse lead-ins.

The feel of these chords is significantly different from most of my other songs. I use more open strings here to create a bit of an emptier feel. I got these chords from listening to a few singer-songwriters, such as John Hiatt and Jude Cole. As for the bridge, I knew I wanted a good rock solo in there, and I wrote the chord progression to make it happen. As it is, my guitar playing may not be on par with my guitar idols, but I think I got the basic feel of it down.

### ***Wanna Get You Back***

To the best of my knowledge, this is the only decent song I've written on my electric guitar. A second oddity about this song is that I wrote it at home. I was home on my Spring Break, and had left my acoustic guitar at school to save space in my Jeep. My electric was at home, and I was antsy to play it. One afternoon, after my parents went out to take care of some errands, I started playing. All of a sudden, I hit on the three-chord progression that is the main theme for this song. From there, I just started singing. I wrote down the lyrics I liked, and kept playing until I had it together. This one took me less than an hour to write, and it's still a fun one for me to play. It's one of the few songs I've written that has this much of a rock 'n' roll feel to it. It's also one of my more concise. It's a very simple song, with a very simple message to it: "Let me back in!!"

### ***One More Time***

This is the oldest song in the collection. I wrote this in April 1999 as part of a project for my first Honors Colloquium. I was in Maude Jennings' class, one that took a Spring Break trip to Chicago to explore some of the artistic sites of the town. Our final project for the semester was to put together a creative work. At this point, I was still pretty new to the world of guitar playing, so I was a little scared. I gradually became more willing to write songs throughout the semester. With about a month to go, I was sitting at dinner with a friend of mine. She was talking about a creative project that she was doing for one of her classes. She mentioned how she wanted to use it to say "thank you" to the teacher she had. Those words struck a chord in my head. This was 6 p.m. I didn't start writing until 11. By 1 a.m. that night, I had this song finished. I couldn't settle in bed until I had all these words written out. At the end of the semester, I took my guitar and performed this song in front of my class. This was my first time performing in front of a group of people, and it was a very nerve-wracking experience, especially when the subject of the song was sitting in the back of the room, watching my every move.

In the end, the song became a thank-you to her for the classes I had had with her. She was a part of each of my first four semesters of class. Five others had shared that experience with me, and it represented the feelings of each of us as we stepped out into the rest of our collegiate lives. As I have gained more distance between those days and now, it has started to fit more situations in my life. It's a good farewell song to anyone who has had an effect on your life. It's not sad, but instead, it reaches for the nostalgia of the time spent between the singer and the subject. And for me, it's a perfect way to end this album.

I would like to personally thank the following people:

**Mom and Dad:** for being so encouraging with this music thing, for the musical gifts over the years, and for the patience when I wasn't doing so well. And, you know, for these 21 years so far.

**The Kroger Company:** for striking in 1971.

**Robin Freeman and Bre Garbas:** for sitting and listening to me play my own songs for you that one night... and for all the other times you've listened and sung along.

**Jennifer Brown:** for listening, for encouraging, and for showing me someone else with so much passion for being involved in music.

**Rawley Rearick:** just for being a great friend in the last couple years. You've been a great support for me.

**Sara St Clair:** for encouraging me to play my own stuff in front of a bunch of people I didn't know. And for that big smile.

**Karen Dingleline:** for asking for a sequel to that tape I did for you.

**Eve Pardue:** for listening to my songs when I was too afraid to show them to anyone else.

**Brandon Smith:** for not throwing my guitar out the window freshman year, when I was just learning how to play, and probably giving you permanent hearing damage in the process!

**The Ball State Equestrian Team:** for letting me join the team and bring my guitar. And for cheering for me, both with the guitar and on the horses.

**Grandpa Ross:** for giving me that guitar all those years ago. I know you're not here anymore, but I'm sure you can hear me. I hope you're enjoying this.

**Damon May:** for pushing me with my writing, for rooming with me, and for performing with me that one time.

**Aunt Jo:** for giving me Full Moon Fever back in 1990. I'm still listening.

**Brian Pearce:** for helping me figure out all the ins and outs of Studio E, and for helping me to get all those cords in the right sockets.

**Maude Jennings:** for giving me my first chance to perform for people, and for being a wonderful guide through my first two years of college.

**Stan Sollars:** for giving me the chance to do this project. And for always saying that you knew I could do it.

You all are a part of me and the music I play. Thank you.

All instruments played by Kevin Ross

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Recorded at Ball Communications Building, Studio E, Ball State University, and Swinford Hall Room 315, Ball State University, January-April 2001

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